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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000647

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL
BEIJING PASS CHENGDU

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [PREF](#) [NP](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: MOUNT KAILAS TO REOPEN TO TOURISTS FROM NEPAL

Classified By: A/DCM Michael S. Hoza, Reasons 1.5 (b), (d).

1. (C) Travel agencies in Kathmandu report that as of late March they were able to resume booking tours to western Tibet,s Mount Kailas after the Chinese government lifted restrictions on travel to that region. Tours are now being booked for dates in late April and May. Nepal,s travel agents say they had been unable to book tours to Kailas since September 11.

2. (C) The Lhasa-based partner of one Kathmandu agent speculated that China would not announce the change publicly because they did not want to draw attention to it. Thus, he speculated, in future they could easily restrict access again, should they feel it necessary, without the need for public acknowledgement.

3. (C) Despite the deteriorating security situation in Nepal, demand for package tours to Kailas from Nepal remains fairly high. However, due to conditions inside Nepal, Kathmandu tour operators have begun - literally speaking - to take a different approach to Kailas. Previously, Kailas-bound tourists flew to western Nepal and hiked over the Himalayas to their destination. Nowadays tours take the highway north to Tibet via Kodari, turn left, and drive along the Chinese road to the base of the sacred mountain.
MALINOWSKI